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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development
and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in achieving
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment
and decent work for all**

Statement submitted by International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The International Federation on Ageing is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) with a membership base of NGOs, the corporate sector, academia, Governments and individuals that is dedicated to improving the quality of life for older people by stimulating, collecting, analysing and disseminating information on rights, policies and practices. Its biennial conferences provide an international platform to exchange information and create innovative and diverse partnerships to address ageing-related issues.

We appreciate this opportunity to address the Commission for Social Development under the agenda item entitled, “Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all”.

Last century saw the beginning of an unprecedented worldwide demographic shift that will continue well into the twenty-first century. Today, one in every nine persons in the world is 60 years of age or older. In less than three decades that ratio will increase to one in every five persons. In projected numbers that translates into 2 billion older persons by 2050.

In 1994 the World Summit for Social Development recognized that people living in poverty and other vulnerable groups, including older persons, must be empowered through organization and participation in all aspects of political, economic and social life, particularly in the planning and implementation of policies that affect them. Twenty years later this goal has yet to be addressed let alone reached. Moreover, during this time, the position of older persons in many societies throughout the world has been weakened by factors such as the increase in the growth of the nuclear family, emigration of younger family members both within their home countries and to other nations, as well as barriers to the employment of older persons, to mention but a few.

Poverty is more than a lack of financial resources. It isolates and marginalizes. It is a serious threat to one’s physical and mental well-being, to one’s dignity and the ability to participate in society. Moreover, poverty has a strong gender dimension. In 2001 the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognized this when it defined poverty as the “sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights” ([E/C.12/2001/10](#), para. 8). This definition was echoed in article 5 of the Political Declaration adopted by the 163 Governments attending the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, which also called for the empowerment of older persons and the promotion of their full participation in all aspects of society (art. 12).

Empowerment has many interpretations both in concept and practice. For older persons, however, empowerment is usually dependent on their ability to provide for themselves and to make choices about their lives. While the empowerment of older persons in general has been affected by many societal changes, the lack of economic security has become an almost impenetrable barrier to achieving empowerment for the elderly who live in poverty. Poverty is a challenge to the human rights of all those who live in it.

Regrettably, there is not a worldwide database documenting the extent of elderly poverty. However, there is universal acknowledgement that it is a global issue, existing in developed as well as developing nations, and that the most vulnerable of older persons — women, the disabled, minority group members and indigenous groups — are disproportionately affected. In the recent publication, *Ageing in the Twenty-first Century: A Celebration and a Challenge*, the United Nations Population Fund states that income security is “among the most urgent concerns of older persons worldwide”.

For us, it highlights the necessity to endow older persons with the authority to lead, or at least to have a voice and participate in decision-making in their communities. The Economic Commission for Europe Task Force on Ageing Workshop in León, Spain, in November 2008, referred to this as “participatory democracy” which enables all constituents in a society to have a role in policy and programme development and execution. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing describes and subscribes to this, “the bottom-up approach” to participation and problem-solving.

Now is the time for the United Nations to recognize older persons as a major group. The opportunity was missed in 1992 when Agenda 21, the outcome document of the 1992 Rio conference, failed to acknowledge the “longevity revolution”, and in turn failed to acknowledge that worldwide growth in ageing constitutes a major group. The Millennium Development Goals of 2000 similarly “forgot” the growing cohort of older persons.

The late Ambassador Julia Alvarez termed the shift in population make-up the “agequake” and received General Assembly agreement to have 1999 designated as the International Year of Older Persons. The United Nations was most cooperative in providing publications that provided national and regional groups with information and suggestions for implementing and commemorating this notable effort. Owing to its success, the International Year of Older Persons 1999 was the precursor to the General Assembly’s agreement to sponsor another major international event, the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid in April 2002. The outcome document of the Assembly, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, continues to inform the work of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs as well as that of the NGO community involved in ageing issues.

The International Federation on Ageing believes ageing issues are as important as the issues affecting women and children and we support social responsibility and the issues of social inclusion in decision-making, as enshrined by the 1994 World Summit for Social Development.

The failure of not including ageing in the Millennium Development Goals of 2000 to 2015 must not be repeated in the development of the post-2015 goals. This is our opportunity to recognize that the ageing world population is of paramount importance. By redefining the life cycle, we will ensure that older persons are regarded as resources well into late life. This will have positive long-term effects economically as well as socially.

The United Nations serves a unique role in society by promoting and facilitating cooperation between Member States and providing a platform for dialogue. By recognizing and utilizing the world’s growing ageing populations, the United Nations will be strengthened and in turn will strengthen the nations of the

world. Now is the time to ensure that the interests of older persons are prioritized on a par with those of younger age groups. We must recognize the cohorts of older people as a major group, with their needs, issues, concerns and value promoted and enshrined in the next goals being debated at this time.

As we have stated in the past, the International Federation on Ageing is eager to partner with Governments in developing and implementing the goals of the United Nations. We continue to work actively towards this end and look forward to continuing these efforts.
